

Last weekend we had to make the big decision to move our almost two year old daughter out of her crib and into her own bed. This is a hard enough decision in and of itself, made much more difficult by the fact that Lydia was only in her crib for about six weeks, and I use the term 'in her crib' very loosely. For those who might not know, we brought Lydia home from China in January and it's been a whirlwind experience for all of us. Lydia has been gracious and loving and receptive, more than we could ever really imagine her being. She has been a total joy...except at bedtime. Consistently through our time in China with her, as well as back in Hinsdale, save the first few days of total shell-shock in her new house, Lydia has hated being in the crib. For the last few weeks, I've been kicked out of the bed by my lovely daughter and had to find a couch in the middle of night. It got to a point when we had to face two realities: This is not working for our marriage, and Lydia, after spending what we assume were numerous waking hours confined to a crib, may well just done with cribs in general. It was hard to take that crib down, hard to dismantle the perfect nursery my wife had created before we could really even enjoy it.

So now, Lydia sleeps in her own bed, and Katie and I have the privilege of taking turns falling asleep with her in her bed, or at least faking it so that she will fall asleep. Early one morning this week, I climbed in bed with her as she fussed sleepily. I watched her fall asleep and I was so amazed, amazed that she was in my house, that she had become such a natural part of the family. I gazed at her and wondered, "God what are you going to do with this one?" What great story are you writing here that I just can't see."

We continue in the Upper Room Discourse in John 14, and Jesus, in an intimate setting with his disciples is tenderly, carefully preparing them for what is ahead. And as you might imagine, I've been so drawn to verse 18 which says, "I will not leave you orphaned and abandoned. I will come

to you." Watching an orphan become a daughter in my very home has shaped me in ways that I couldn't possibly verbalize, but I so clearly see God's promise in my daughter Lydia, and the more I read this passage the more I'm fascinated with this verse. This is the central promise of our text, that our lives are covered by God in such a way that we will never be orphaned or abandoned, but Jesus will come to us. I want to focus on this verse because it's the promise that this upper room discourse hangs upon.

You see, there is a story being written in the person of Jesus Christ that is so much bigger than these disciples can even imagine. This is a story that began at the dawn of creation, when a timeless creator stepped into time and created all things because he was so full of love. And he creates for himself a people who calls Israel, and he leads them, and provides for them, and instructs them, but in the end sin and brokenness take center stage and God has to change his plan and figure out a new way to deal with sin because it is such a distinctive barrier between he and the people he created and so loved. "For God so loved the world, that he gave to that world his one and only Son, so that we would no longer languish and perish in the brokenness of sin, but might have the real hope of eternal life." That's Jesus. What a story, what a narrative. And in many ways, the upper room is a turning point in the story, because Jesus is leaving his followers to head to the cross and deal with the mortal problem of sin.

So he starts his last evening with his friends in the Upper Room, and these are Jesus most poignant words and actions to help his friends follow him. If we read these passages as mere story and history, we've entirely missed the point. These are words we should absorb so that we might follow Jesus. So Jesus first models service for the disciples in the washing of feet, he has identified his betrayer Judas and his future denier Peter, and now Jesus looks at them, and

begins to speak from his heart. "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. In my Father's house there are many rooms and I'm going there, and I'm going to prepare a place for you. And I will come back to you so that you might be where I am."

This is the message of John 14. Jesus says, "I'm going. I'll come back, but I have to go now." Predictably, the disciples are confused by this, and frankly if you followed along with the reading this morning, I would suspect that you are a bit confused too. Thomas asks plainly, "If we don't know where you're going, how can we follow?" Philips says simply, "Just make it easy on us and show us the way to Father." The disciples are not seeing the full picture, not completely understanding, and in that way, I find companionship with them.

That is so much of my life. I desire to follow Jesus but the way isn't always crystal clear to me. Sometimes I'm tempted to remind Jesus that his call on my life was to follow, not to discern which way to follow. I want to know more of the story and how it's unfolding. But my story, your story, is continuing to be written. It's not a script.

I was involved in a number of plays in musicals when I was younger and I really enjoyed them. I enjoyed memorizing lines, having directors stage me, and performing in front of others. I was in a musical in highschool and I played the part of the narrator. I often got cast as the narrator and looking back now I'm pretty sure I know the reason why. The narrator just stands there, and never dances. Enough said. One of the scenes had the narrator interacting with another character, played by a classmate of mine. I'll never forget, on open night, delivering a line with this classmate, and seeing his eyes look at me in terror. He forgot his line. I was able to ask a prompting question, totally off script, and he was able to get his line. I delivered my next line, and

you guessed it, he froze again. I realized that I couldn't keep feeding him lines, and he did something that I had a hard time forgiving him for, he went off script. He began to improvise. He obviously knew the core of the story, the general direction of the dialogue, and he forced me to improvise with him. I'm so thankful that no footage of this has ever surfaced, because I can't imagine how we actually made it to the next number. But we did, and not having a script was just plain scary.

And that is exactly why Jesus starts with those words: "Don't let your heart be troubled. Trust in God and trust in me." He knew that his disciples would love for him to give them a script. "Here Thomas, if you just stick to this script, you'll be totally good." "Here Philip, say this, do this, move here, move there and the story will go on." But Jesus doesn't say that. He says 'trust me'.

Theologian Samuel Wells deals with the idea in depth in his book 'improvisation'. He likens our following Christ in community to the art form of improvisation. I've you've seen good improv before, you know what a fantastic artform it is. No script, no directors, just reaction, communication and a lot of trust. Wells makes the case that improvisation is impossible without trust.

And we can trust Jesus, because Jesus' reality is so far beyond the current twist or turn in the story. Remember that Jesus and the Father are one, bound together by the Holy Spirit, and they existed before time and operate beyond time. Jesus knows the narrative, he knows the story. He understands what is next, what he was put on earth to do, and because of that he's able to ask for our trust. If you're like me, you probably forget that we serve a God beyond time and space. You probably get caught in the moment, bound by time and forget that God chooses to step into

time in the person of Jesus Christ, but he is not extant within human time.

And Jesus makes this clear in verse 18 when he says 'I will come to you'. Every scholar that studies this passage asks the question, what 'coming' is Jesus talking about? There are three options within this chapter. The first coming we see in verse 19 when he says, "before long...you will see me." Many have seen this as a nod to the appearances of Jesus after the resurrection, such as the narrative of Thomas doubting Jesus. Jesus is giving a temporal promise - you wouldn't see me, but in a little bit you will. Another possible coming is in verse 16-17 when Jesus says that God the Father will send the Spirit of truth to be with them forever. The coming of the Spirit is a major theme in the Upper Room discourse. Jesus is leaving in body, but he promises to come to them through his Holy Spirit and dwell with them forever. We'll study this more in chapter 16. A third coming that some scholars argue is what we've already read in verse 2. Jesus states that he's headed to his Father's house, which many assume to be heaven. If he we're coming back from that, as he promises in verse 3, it's hard to overlook the notion that Jesus could be promising to come again, in the 2nd coming, when he will make all things right.

Now here's what verse 18 is so amazing - it gives space for all of these to be correct. When Jesus "I will come to you", the verb come is actually in the present tense. For lack of better English, we might translate it, "I will currently come to you", or paraphrasing, "I have come for you, I am currently coming to you, and I will ultimately come upon you." Only a God who stands outside of time could say such a thing.

I look at my daughter and I see God coming to her. She was abandoned on the steps of an orphanage at six days old. I grieve that she will never know why, she will never know that part of

her story. And then she stayed in an orphanage for a year and a half before a family halfway around the world said, 'yes, we want her'. God's promise is so true for her, *he did not leave her abandoned. He continually came to her.* But the amazing thing is that she came to us at a time when I was wondering if we'd been abandoned, with a story of pain and loss. I remember a couple years ago, in the midst of the pain walking out on a cold night to throw the garbage out and asking God, "What's with my story right now? Can you fill me in on the script because I'm losing hope and I'm feeling alone." The word that God gave me? Lars, I won't leave you orphaned or abandoned." Little did I know that at that same time, a girl was being abandoned in Xinyang, China, an orphan who would forever be a sign of God's coming to me.

The miracle of Lydia's story is not that a family from Hinsdale adopted her. Not even close. The miracle of her story is that God came for her, is currently coming to her, and ultimately will come upon her, and she will never be left orphaned.

You are in the midst of a story, a story that began long ago, and now you're called to follow in the midst of it. Whatever it is that you face, the God who is beyond time knows the outcome. He knows your anxious heart and says, "trust in me". Entrust your story to me. There are no lines to rehearse, no pre-staged scenes, but an opportunity to improvise with the director himself, the God of the meta-narrative that binds the entire world together. He himself came so that you wouldn't be bound to sin, he continues to come in the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and he will come again and make all things right. I pray that as you rest in that promise, that you might with a great wonder, in the intimate care of your Savior, say in your own words, "God, I so wonder what good you are going to do with my story being written. I don't know the end, but you do. So I receive your coming to me right now, and I'll receive your coming to me then. I trust you God with my

story. I know you'll never leave me. I don't need to follow a script. It's enough for me to follow you."

We're all sleeping better now that Lydia is out of her crib and in a bed. The three of us are enjoying the freedom from sleep deprivation. The first night on a mattress was a big nerveracking. We didn't want her to fall, and to be honest we were probably both frightened that this was not going to work either, that the wailing would begin and we'd be back to square one. Katie took that first bedtime. She put on some music, got the bed just right, rocked Lydia for a bit and then laid her down in bed and snuggled in next to her. No crying, no wailing, and within a couple minutes her eyes started to get heavy and as Katie watched her fall to sleep, she heard lyrics being sung, words that were intended for Liddy, but were absolutely given in that moment as a promise for her mother:

So remember, never doubt this

Hold it tightly to your heart

I'm forever, always with you

I will be right where you are

I will never leave you or forsake you

Know that I am with you

You will never be alone